Chapter 70: Festering Malice ①
IT WOULD BE EASIER TO HAVE THE MOXA NEEDED DELIVERED ...
...BUT I CAN SIMPLY MAKE IT FROM INGREDIENTS I CAN GATHER IN THE INNER COURT.
HONGNIANG STILL ISN'T ABOUT TO TRUST A FELON...
...SO SHE ORDERED ME TO GO ABOUT MY DUTIES AS NORMAL.
医務室
THIS CAT IS SO CLEVER, IT SIMPLY EATS AROUND FISH HEADS AND TAILS AND INNARDS.
YOU KNOW, IT'S SO FUNNY.
MY, DOES IT REALLY?
THAT ALSO GIVES ME AN EXCUSE TO VISIT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE.

HE'S BEEN TELLING PA SO MANY NEEDLESS THINGS.
IN THE DAYS SINCE PA'S ARRIVAL ...
...THE QUACK HAS BEEN ALL TOO EAGER TO HAVE SOMEONE THAT ACTUALLY LISTENS TO HIM.
YOU'RE NOT IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT ANYMORE, YOU CAN GET DECENT MEALS HERE.
THE POOR THING IS MISSING OUT, THEN.
NOM
PA IS, WITHOUT QUESTION, A BRILLIANT DOCTOR...
...YET HE'D EVEN TREAT A CAT'S LEFTOVERS LIKE SOME KIND OF FEAST.
HE'S A SIMPLE MAN, BEREFT OF DESIRE.
HE NEVER CHANGES...
HAAH...

HE SPENDS ALMOST ALL HIS TIME HERE, IN THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE...
...BUT IS OCCA-SIONALLY CALLED UPON BY A EUNUCH TO HELP OUT ELSE-WHERE.
MAYBE JINSHI'S ARRANGED FOR HIM TO HELP CONSORT LIHUA, AS WELL.
I SUPPOSE IF HE'S GOING TO STAY IN THE INNER COURT, HE ISN'T ALLOWED TO SHOW FAVORITISM TO ANY ONE CONSORT.

SINCE XING LEFT THE POSITION OF HEAD LADY-IN-WAITING ...
...THE CRYSTAL PALACE HAS TAKEN IN MANY MORE OLDER, UNOBTRUSIVE LADIES-IN-WAITING.
THE TYPE WHO WOULD BE FAR MORE LIKELY TO KNOW HOW TO ENSURE A HEALTHY BIRTH.
IF THE CHILDREN THE CONSORTS ARE CARRYING ARE TO GROW UP WELL...
...THAT STARTS WITH A SAFE BIRTH, FIRST AND FOREMOST.
THE INNER COURT'S PURPOSE IS, IN PART, TO FACILITATE RAISING CHILDREN ...
...BUT IT'S DONE A POOR JOB OF THAT SO FAR.
SIRE AS MANY AS POSSIBLE, AND LET THOSE THAT SURVIVE LIVE ON AS THE EMPEROR'S CHILDREN.
IF THIS IS SIMPLY THE FATE THEY BEAR, THEN SO BE IT.
BUT WITH HIS CHILDREN CONTINUING TO PASS AS INFANTS ...
...THERE ARE TOO FEW MALE HEIRS OF THE EMPEROR'S LINE.

PUTTING IT MORE CRUDELY, WE AREN'T GOING TO HAVE ENOUGH BREEDING STOCK FOR THE COMING GENERA-TIONS.
PA MUST'VE NOTICED THAT TOO.
YOU HAVE BEAUTIFUL HAND-WRITING.
QUITE.
BUT THE WORDING YOU USE SOUNDS ALMOST... CHILDISH?
OKAY? AND?
鉛或水
BUT...
...THAT LEAVES ME TO WONDER WHAT HE'LL DO TO RESOLVE THE ISSUES THE INNER COURT IS FACING.
SOME HERE ARE STILL ONLY CAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING SIMPLE LANGUAGE.
AH! OF COURSE.
PAP

CAN YOU SEE ANYTHING WRONG WITH THIS?
MAOMAO.

?
STARE...
I SEE.
IT SEEMS FINE, FROM A CURSORY GLANCE.
...

I WONDER, DO YOU HAVE THESE HALF-SHEETS OF PAPER...
...BACK AT YOUR HOME?
GUEN?
GUEN.

...WAIT. THAT'S THE QUACK'S NAME?
HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A GUEN.
YES, THOUGH SCRAP PAPER LIKE THIS ISN'T FOR SALE.
IT'S USUALLY PULPED AND RECYCLED TO MAKE FRESH SHEETS OF PAPER.
THEN, WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO SELL IT AT A REDUCED PRICE?
OF COURSE, OF COURSE.
THEN...
MAYBE THIS WOULD BE USEFUL FOR WRITING PRACTICE?
THERE'S BEEN WRITING LESSONS HELD HERE RECENTLY, YES?
HOW GOOD WOULD YOU SAY THE STUDENTS HAVE GOTTEN?
IT DEPENDS ON THE PERSON, BUT OVERALL, THEY SEEM CAPABLE OF BASIC READING.

HE HAS A MERCHANT'S KNACK FOR USING EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING TO THEIR FULLEST POTENTIAL...
...AND STILL, HE INSISTS ON GIVING TO CHARITY WHILE HE HIMSELF WASTES AWAY. I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND IT.
I DOUBT ANYONE WOULD HEAR ME OUT IF I ASKED. YOU SHOULD HAVE BETTER LUCK, DON'T YOU THINK?
...
I WILL SEE WHAT I CAN DO.
I THINK WHAT PA IS TRYING TO DO...
...IS GAIN FAVOR HERE.
THANK YOU.

I NEED TO FETCH ALCOHOL AND SLEEP MEDICATION, SIR.
SURE, SURE.
AH. BUT BEFORE THAT...
I SHOULD MAKE A FORMAL SUGGES-TION...
...BUT IF I ASK JINSHI, IT COULD TAKE DAYS TO GO THROUGH.
OR I COULD JUST GO TO THE CLASS-ROOM.
...BUT WHEN I TOOK IT WITHOUT ASKING, PA REALLY LET ME HAVE IT. I NEED TO SHOW THE QUACK "MORE RESPECT."
I ACTUALLY MADE THIS ALCOHOL IN THE FIRST PLACE...
THIS SHOULD BE GOOD.
TUG TUG
HM?
SOME-THING THAT WON'T STRAIN HER BODY, TO BE SAFE.
...IS FOR CONSORT GYOKUYO. PREGNANCY DISRUPTS HER SLEEP.
THE SLEEPING MEDICA-TION...

OH DEAR, IS SOMETHING WRONG?
STOP THAT. YOU'LL TEAR IT.
MEOOOW
IS IT THIS?
THERE ARE BETTER THINGS TO PLAY WITH THAN PRECIOUS MEDICATION.
CUT THAT OUT.
MEOOOW
MEOOOW

I COMPLETELY FORGOT TO WEAR JINSHI'S HAIR PIN.
I CAN WEAR IT LATER.
OH.
HAAH...
...THE TEASING IN STORE FOR ME, ONCE I DO THAT.
GRIN
GRIN
THOUGH, I CAN ALREADY IMAGINE...

HE'S NOT HERE TODAY?
IS HE IN HIS ROOM, THEN?
HE MIGHT BE RECEPTIVE TO THE IDEA.
THE OLD EUNUCH THAT LOOKS AFTER THE SHRINE...
...IS A BIT OF A PAIN, BUT HE SEEMED TO KNOW PA.

EXCUSE ME.
HERE.
SWSH
HE'S QUITE FOND OF XIAOLAN.
REALLY, A LOT OF PEOPLE SEEM FOND OF XIAOLAN.
NOT WITH XIAOLAN TODAY, HM?
COME IN
COME IN
THIS IS A MORE PERSONAL ERRAND.

AH. LUOMEN'S HANDWRITING.
YOU GRASPED THAT QUICKLY.
TAKE A SEAT.
BACK WHEN WE WERE TAKING OUR CIVIL SERVICE EXAMS...
...EVERYONE BELIEVED COPYING HIS WRITING WAS KEY TO PASSING.
SO EVERYONE DID JUST THAT.
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN FORTY TO FIFTY YEARS AGO.
MEDICAL OFFICERS AND CIVIL OFFICIALS TAKE DIFFERENT EXAMS...
...BUT PA WAS ABLE TO PASS BOTH.

HE'S ALWAYS BEEN THAT KIND OF MAN.
AND, AS A CONSE-QUENCE, HIS OWN FATHER NEVER REALLY CARED FOR HIM.
HE COULD'VE EASILY BEEN A CIVIL OFFICIAL ...
...BUT TREATING A COLLAPSED STREET URCHIN PUSHED HIM TO WORK AS A DOCTOR, INSTEAD.
IF XIAOLAN KNEW, I WOULD HOPE SHE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME.
...LOUD ENOUGH TO DROWN THIS NEWS OUT.
MAYBE THE RUMORS ABOUT THE YOUNGER EUNUCHS WERE JUST...
NO, IN FACT, HE'S IN THE INNER COURT RIGHT NOW.
DID HE GO THROUGH THE TROUBLE OF SENDING THIS PAPER ALL THE WAY HERE?
WELL! THAT'S NEWS TO ME.
STRANGE. XIAOLAN LOVES NOTHING MORE THAN TO GOSSIP.
HAS THE NEWS NOT GOTTEN TO THE NORTH END?
ACTUALLY, XIAOLAN DIDN'T SEEM VERY INTERESTED IN PA AT ALL.
HUH.
THAT'S MY PA.

THE YOUNGER EUNUCHS ...
I KNOW THERE ISN'T MUCH TO TALK ABOUT HERE...
...BUT IT'D BE BETTER NOT TO MAKE SUCH A FUSS ABOUT THEM.

THE CLINIC?
AND THE CLINIC, AS WELL.
THEY MUST BE HELPING OUT THERE, FOR WHATEVER REASON.

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?
WELL...
THE LADIES-IN-WAITING IN THE SOUTH END ARE NEGLECTING THEIR WORK, SO...
...MORE AND MORE EUNUCHS HAVE BEEN SENT HERE.

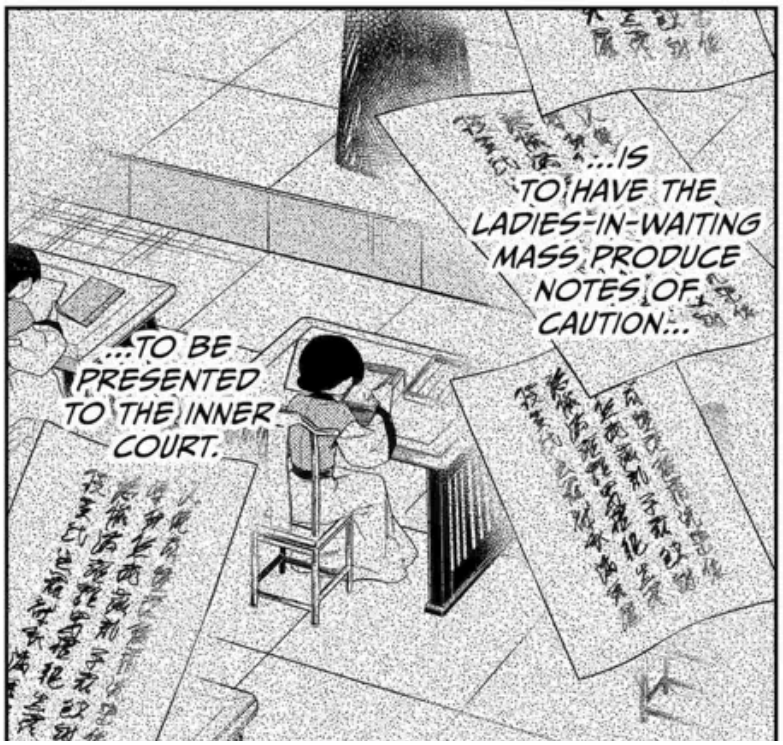
I WOULD BET THAT...
...SHE'S MAKING FULL USE OF THE NEW ARRIVALS.
I REMEMBER MEETING A SOMEWHAT COMMANDING LADY-IN-WAITING NAMED SHENLÜ THERE.
THE CLINIC IS STAFFED BY OLDER, EXPERIENCED LADIES-IN-WAITING.

WE CAN HAVE PAPER PREPARED FOR YOU, SO...
...I WANTED TO ASK, COULD YOU USE THIS...
...AS A SAMPLE FOR THE WRITING LESSONS FOR THE LADIES-IN-WAITING?
BUT, BACK TO THE MATTER AT HAND. WHAT DID YOU NEED?
...AGAIN? HAVE YOU DONE THIS SORT OF THING BEFORE?
CERTAINLY, A MUCH EASIER FAVOR TO GRANT THAN ACTUALLY WRITING IT MYSELF AGAIN.
IF THAT'S IT, THEN IT WOULDN'T BE ANY TROUBLE AT ALL.
I REMEMBER FINDING LUOMEN WRITING SHEET AFTER SHEET ALL ON HIS OWN, SO I DECIDED TO HELP.
YES, WELL, THIS IS NOT UNLIKE SOMETHING WE DID MANY DECADES AGO.

THEY WOUND UP POSTED ALL OVER THE INNER COURT, BUT AFTER ALL THAT LABOR...
...I WAS COMFORTABLE NEVER LOOKING AT THEM AGAIN.

WHAT PA WANTS...

I CAN SEE THAT IN HIS OLDER AGE...
...HE'S LEARNED HOW TO BETTER USE THE PEOPLE AROUND HIM.


...IS TO HAVE THE LADIES-IN-WAITING MASS PRODUCE NOTES OF CAUTION...
...TO BE PRESENTED TO THE INNER COURT.

THIS NOTE WARNS ABOUT A NUMBER OF THINGS, INCLUDING POISON FACE POWDER, IN VERY PLAIN LANGUAGE.
...AND HE'S DONE THIS ONCE BEFORE, IN THE PAST?
LATER
THEN WE'LL BRING MORE PAPER LATER ON.
OH?
YOU WON'T STAY FOR A CUP OF TEA?

I NEED TO GO, RIGHT NOW.
NO, SORRY. I'M IN A BIT OF A HURRY!
I NEED TO BE SURE OF SOMETHING BEFORE I CAN LET GO OF THIS UNEASE.